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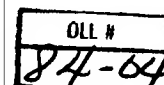
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 FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
 TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1455
 INFO RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0303
 RUESQI/AMEMBASSY QUITO 1557
 RUESLM/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1769
 RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 2669
 RUEHLL/CONTADORA COLLECTIVE
 RUEOEHA/USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS
 BT
 C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 00663

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PREL, CO, CU

SUBJECT: BETANCUR SAYS HE HAS "NO INTEREST" IN RELATIONS
 - WITH CUBA; GARCIA-MARQUEZ DENIES INVITING
 - CASTRO TO COLOMBIA

REF: BOGOTA 594

1. (C) DURING A MEETING WITH CODEL SOLARZ ON JANUARY 18, COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT BELISARIO BETANCUR TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE HAS "NO INTENTION" OF MEETING WITH CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO, AND THAT HE "HAS NO INTEREST IN RESUMING RELATIONS WITH CUBA."

2. (U) NEVERTHELESS, IN A SPEECH DELIVERED TO THE COLOMBIAN NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL THE SAME DAY AND REPORTED IN THE JANUARY 19 "EL ESPECTADOR," BETANCUR STRESSED THAT COLOMBIA HAS A LONG TRADITION OF MAINTAINING RELATIONS WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF GOVERNMENTS, WITHOUT THEREBY IMPLYING EITHER PHILOSOPHICAL IDENTIFICATION WITH THEIR REGIMES OR THE RENUNCIATION OF COLOMBIA'S OWN DEMOCRATIC AND CHRISTIAN HERITAGE. "IN TODAY'S WORLD THIS IS INEVITABLE," BETANCUR ASSERTED. "NOT ONLY IS IT POSSIBLE, BUT USEFUL, TO HAVE COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION BETWEEN PEOPLES RULED BY DIFFERENT SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEMS, AS CAN BE SEEN IN THE CASE OF THE SUPERPOWERS THEMSELVES, WHO WRAP THEIR IDEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL DIFFERENCES IN THE MANTLE OF THEIR PERMANENT RELATIONS."

3. (U) THE JANUARY 19 EDITION OF LIBERAL DAILY "EL ESPECTADOR" ALSO REPORTS THAT NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ DENIED INVITING CASTRO FOR A PRIVATE VISIT TO COLOMBIA (REFTEL). SPEAKING BY TELEPHONE FROM MEXICO, WHERE HE SAID HE IS WORKING ON A NEW NOVEL, GARCIA MARQUEZ TOLD EL ESPECTADOR, "THE REPORT THAT

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I INVITED PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO, WHATEVER ITS SOURCE, IS COMPLETELY LACKING IN SERIOUSNESS. FIDEL CASTRO IS A HEAD OF STATE, AND AS SUCH CAN ONLY BE INVITED TO COLOMBIA BY THE COLOMBIAN HEAD OF STATE. I AM NOT YET SO CRAZY AS TO ARROGATE TO MYSELF THE RIGHTS BELONGING TO PRESIDENT BETANCUR."

4. (C) IN THE MEETING WITH BETANCUR, CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ ASKED THE PRESIDENT WHAT CASTRO'S REACTION WOULD BE IF THE U.S. WERE TO PROPOSE A RESUMPTION OF U.S.-CUBAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN EXCHANGE FOR A CUBAN PROMISE TO REFRAIN FROM SUPPORTING REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA. BETANCUR SAID HE DID NOT KNOW. HE STATED THAT HE DOES NOT KNOW CASTRO WELL, BUT THAT CASTRO HAS "POINTS OF PERSONAL PRIDE" THAT COMPLICATE DEALING WITH HIM ON RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. WHAT SOLARZ SUGGESTED, BETANCUR FELT, WOULD BE "A PATHY WORTH TRYING." HE SUGGESTED THAT THE UNITED STATES COULD ESTABLISH COMMERCIAL RELATIONS WITH CUBA AS A FIRST STEP IN A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS LEADING TO FULLY NORMALIZED RELATIONS. WITH EACH STEP, BETANCUR SAID, THE UNITED STATES COULD ASSESS WHETHER CUBA WAS TAKING APPROPRIATE RECIPROCAL ACTION.

5. (C) COMMENT: BETANCUR'S SUGGESTION OF A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND CUBA MAY WELL BE A REFLECTION OF HIS OWN INTENTIONS REGARDING COLOMBIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE CASTRO REGIME. HIS REFERENCE TO COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE IN HIS JANUARY 18 SPEECH TO THE COLOMBIAN NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MAY ALSO HINT AT HIS INTENTIONS TOWARDS CUBA. TAMBS
END OF MESSAGE

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